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The Story of Leavenworth

The City of Leavenworth was famous fifty years ago. It was a great fitting-out station for traders to Santa Fe and for parties and caravans getting ready to cross the plains. It was a thriving little city. All its business men were doing so well that in leisure hours, when they met to talk over affairs, they always reached the same conclusion: "God had fixed the site of their town for a great city; nothing could balk that decree of fate."

But the gold from California began to make its impression upon the Eastern States. More still it impressed the men of money beyond the sea, for they figured that if such a land as the United States, with unmeasured agricultural resources and with plenty of coal and iron, could have an inexhaustible supplement of gold, it would supply the best place for investing money in the world.

All at once a great many railroad companies, mostly of straw, to be sure, were organized. The railroads over the rocks and through the forests of the Eastern States had, up to that time, cost on an average \$42,500 per mile.

Well, surveys and gorgeous maps were made, pen pictures of the marvelously rich country were drawn; it was estimated that these new roads would not cost to exceed \$30,000 or \$35,000 per mile, and the desire was to sell 7 per cent bonds to the amount of \$25,000 per mile. In England interest was only 4 per cent; over in Amsterdam only 3 per cent. The result was the bonds were sold, the projectors realized from \$5,000 to \$8,000 per mile in cash above the cost of the roads and still owned the roads.

But that did not satisfy them. Many of them obtained land grants—a free gift, and all towns along the lines of the projected roads were asked for free right-of-way through them, enough extra land for depots, shops, etc., and not infrequently a moneyed subsidy.

Well, one of these roads stole down through Missouri. It wanted to cross the Missouri from opposite Leavenworth, but wanted a right-of-way through the city and also that the citizens should help build the bridge.

Several meetings were held to consider the proposition, but the final conclusion was that the company could not help but build through their city. They were willing to do the right thing about the right-of-way, but declined to advance anything toward the bridge. But it happened that some pretty strong men owned the land down at the mouth of the Kaw, and these men quietly informed the agents of the company that if they would cross there they would give them all the land they wanted, and moreover would build the bridge for them.

The offer was accepted and it was in that way that Kansas City was born. The men of Leavenworth sneered for awhile, but finally began to comprehend their danger, and made a struggle to recover their lost ground, but in vain.

Leavenworth remains a way station to this day, while Kansas City is one of the very great cities of the United States, a city of 200,000 people, containing one-tenth of the population of Missouri, while Leavenworth upon a far fairer site and containing a great military post and school, has but 45,000. Say that the railroad proposition was a hold-up if you please, but these are the facts. Kansas City is just about as far from Leavenworth as are Provo and Ogden from Salt Lake.

Had the same spirit governed in Leavenworth as governed down at the mouth of the Kaw, Kansas City would never have caught up with Leavenworth, and we refer to it to call the attention of the men of Salt Lake to the fact that, as a rule, less than a dozen men decide the fate of a growing city, whether it is to be a great commanding city, or a way station.

The opportunities are all on the side of Salt Lake now, but so they were on the side of Leavenworth before Kansas City had a place on the map. Moreover, Leavenworth was on free soil; the site of Kansas City was slave territory, and that should have been a great advantage to the former.

There is another case in the near vicinity of both these cities. St. Joseph was really the natural site for the great city, but St. Joe was intensely Southern. It wanted no immigrants from the Northern States; it cared for no railroads. It was doing well enough; the slaves did most of the work; the society was exclusive—it wanted to be left alone. It was older than either Leavenworth or Kansas City; it had some advantages which could not be taken from it; it was the western terminal of one of the first roads in the old far West; it is in the midst of one of the richest and loveliest countries imaginable, but now it is only half the size of Kansas City and twice the size of Leavenworth. Kansas City may be said to have had its origin on the indifference of Leavenworth and the coldness and semi-hostility of St. Joe, which only proves that if the people of a place would make it great they must seize upon every fair means to boom their town.